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ON PAGE A-2

NEW YORK TIMES  
31 March 1984

# Swedes' Seabed Spy Hunt: No Stone Is Unturned

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Special to The New York Times

STOCKHOLM, March 28 — After more than a month and a half in which it has deployed everything in its anti-submarine arsenal in a vain effort to capture apparent underwater intruders around a top-secret naval base, Swedish military officials remain mystified but convinced that the search should continue.

"We have tried and tried to explain the evidence by natural phenomenon but in the end there are reports that can't be accounted for that way," said Col. Jan-Aake Berg, the chief spokesman for Sweden's Supreme Commander, Lennart Ljung.

The search operation — only the latest of its kind by Sweden — began Feb. 10 after a magnetic detection line was tripped in one of the channels approaching Karlskrona, a base in the south of the country. Two thousand Swedish troops have repeatedly searched islands where mysterious figures thought to be frogmen were reported. The hunt has involved checks of passing vehicles, which in one case included opening a coffin in a funeral cortege.

Depth charges and other explosives have also been used in an effort to force any intruders to the surface. The explosions have noisily punctuated life in the area, attracting crowds of spectators in some cases while shattering nerves in others. Recently the pace of the on-shore activity and the use of explosives slowed while the seabed was "vacuumed" with sensing devices.

## Soviet or Its Allies Suspected

The sightings and recordings by monitoring devices may be inconclusive, but most Swedes seem to believe their military leaders' claims that the waters in the rugged archipelago around Karlskrona and elsewhere are being probed and most are convinced that the challenge to Sweden's defenses is coming from the Soviet Union or its Warsaw Pact allies.

As a result, Prime Minister Olof Palme and the ruling Social Democrats, who have been seeking to improve relations with the Soviet Union, have been forced on the defensive.

"There are two possible explanations," Mr. Palme said in an attempt to calm fears caused by the inconclusive hunt and to fend off critics this month. "The first is that nothing is there and the second is that this case is enormously difficult. As I see it, it is too early to draw any conclusions."

To underline this stand, Mr. Palme has taken such steps as refusing to cut short a skiing vacation during the height of the search and indicating that the Swedish Government wants to resume ministerial-level exchanges that were effectively broken off after a report last spring blaming the Russians for earlier violations of Swedish waters.

## Submarine Runs Aground

There are other reasons the Swedes suspect the Russians again. One is an incident in 1981 when a Soviet submarine ran aground on rocks near Karlskrona. The captain's inconsistent and implausible account of multiple failures in navigation equipment and crew performance irked even those Swedes who are normally sympathetic to the Russians.

Several Soviet defectors have said that the ability to penetrate Swedish waters is regarded as strategically vital to Soviet military planners. According to recent claims by Arkady Shevchenko, a former aide to Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko who defected in 1978, the Soviet Navy was given permission by the Politburo a decade ago to map the Scandinavian coastline by penetrating Swedish and Norwegian waters. Another defector, Viktor Suvorov of the Soviet Army, asserted in a recent article in a United States Army publication, *Military Review*, that two minisubmarines designed for combat intelligence missions were among Soviet vessels involved in incursions into Swedish waters in 1982 and 1983.

Western military experts have had no trouble coming up with theories about why the Russians may be active in Swedish waters. The first mentioned is usually the desire to be able to hide submarines outside Soviet waters in the event of a war with the NATO countries. A second possible reason, a desire to test new underwater warning systems and remote-controlled or in-

termittently manned minisubs without risking an East-West confrontation, could apply to either NATO or Warsaw Pact nations.

## Challenge to Nation's Neutrality

What seems to bother Sweden the most is that the situation is a deep challenge to Swedish neutrality no matter which nation or nations are involved.

"If we don't have the resources in peacetime to protect our territory, how shall our traditional neutrality doctrine — alliance-free in peace, neutral in war — be perceived as trustworthy?" asked Expressen, an evening newspaper here.

The Government and the non-Socialist opposition united last week on an amended budget that substantially increased military spending over the earlier Government proposal. New ships, weapons, helicopters and manpower training programs are all being thrown into expanding antisubmarine abilities.

The skepticism about Moscow's public claims and private assurances that they never intentionally enter Swedish territory has been compounded by reports that the Russians have branded the current search effort as "periscope mania." But the Russians have hit a more sensitive point with some Swedes by noting that the current hunt coincides with efforts by the Swedish military and the non-Socialist parties to increase military spending.

## Search Conditions Are Difficult

"What is going on is a rethinking of the basic concept of neutrality," said Carl Bildt, a Moderate Party member of the Swedish Parliament who has been among the Government's most prominent critics on antisubmarine policy. "The Social Democrats are gradually being dragged toward the need for a stronger defense, but it is

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